

**The Second Sunday of Easter: Holy Trinity Church: April 8, 2018**

**John 20: 19-31: *Be not Afraid. Peace be with you***

**Preached**

**By**

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**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**I once read a story about a man who took his daughter to visit a prospective college. On the campus, for the protection and security of the students, were call boxes placed every few hundred feet apart. If you were wandering around the campus at night and felt uneasy about somebody following you, you could hit the button on that call box and have a security officer come immediately to investigate. On one of these phones hung a sign that said, “Out of Order.”**

**Underneath the “Out of Order” sign someone had scrawled, “Keep on Running!” To me, the “Keep on Running” message is a metaphor for a society in which many people live out their lives, especially in this post 9/11 world.**

**Many people cannot find security or real peace of mind. Many people just cannot relax and rest. They just keep running on the fuel of anxiety.**

**It was evening of the first Easter Sunday. Earlier that morning Peter and John had been to the tomb. They had discovered it was empty. They saw the strips of linen as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head.**

**The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. They knew something important had happened, but they were not quite sure what. So, there they were, these followers of Jesus, behind those locked doors, speaking in whispers, confused, frightened, like sheep without a shepherd. Then, our gospel reading says, “Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side.” Then John adds these words, “The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” This, as broadcaster Paul Harvey used to say, is the rest of the story. Jesus stood in the midst of them. He spoke to them and gave them His peace when He said, “Peace be with you!” Then he showed them his hands and side. There was no longer any doubt. This was their Lord and God, risen from the dead. And they were overjoyed.**

**If the Gospel ended on Easter Sunday morning with the empty tomb and the appearance of the stranger to Mary, there might be some question about the validity of the resurrection. But, it is Easter Sunday evening that puts an end to all that doubt and fear. It is Easter evening that brings peace and joy into the hearts and minds and spirits of those first disciples. It is peace and joy of the resurrection that the first disciples experienced behind those locked doors bolted with fear and doubt and misgivings. It is that same joy that quiets the**

doubts, the fears, and the misgivings we find in our own hearts. Now, there is no question. Jesus is alive, just as he said.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let's take this beautiful gospel story and apply this experience to our own lives. Let's begin with those locked doors. Why were they locked? The doors were locked out of fear. The disciples were terrorized because they thought the same people who crucified Jesus were now coming for them. They hid in that room in abject fear listening for those hurried footsteps and that loud bang on the door ordering them to open up. Jesus had been put to death by his enemies. Would they now turn their hatred on his followers?

Fear is debilitating. Fear keeps us from living our lives openly and joyfully. Fear keeps us looking over our shoulder and running when our real need is to rest and relax. The disciples were behind locked doors out of fear from Jesus' enemies and then Jesus appears in the midst of them and says, "*Peace be with you!*" That was a common greeting in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine and probably one Jesus had spoken to them many times. But in this situation it was more than a greeting. It was a message that they needed to hear. It is a message we need to hear in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Jesus means for us to have peace. The resurrected Jesus didn't promise wealth or health or prosperity or power; what Jesus promised was His peace. I have known so many people, good Christian people, who are never at peace, who never relax, who never rest. They live with troubled hearts because their hearts are filled with fear.**

**During World War II in London's movie theaters a notice would sometimes appear on the screen interrupting the films which said, "An air raid has sounded. Be British. Don't panic." That's great, isn't it? It is so very British. "Be British. Don't panic." A similar admonition ought to characterize all disciples of Jesus: "Be Christian. Don't panic."**

**This week my challenge to you my dear friends in Christ is found in this question, how do you find peace of mind? How do you let go of your fear and doubts and find relaxation and peace of mind? I offer the following list for your consideration taken from a study on human happiness that came out of Duke University several years ago:**

**First, get rid of suspicion and resentment. Nursing or massaging a grudge is a major factor in your unhappiness.**

**Second, do not dwell on the past. The past no longer exists. Move on. An unhealthy preoccupation with old mistakes and failures leads to depression.**

**Third, do not waste time and energy fighting conditions that you cannot change. Cooperate with life, instead of trying to run away from it.**

**Fourth, force yourself to stay involved with the living world. Resist the temptation to withdraw and become reclusive during periods of emotional stress. It can easily lead to self-medication and addiction.**

**Fifth, do not allow yourself to indulge in self-pity when life hands you a raw deal. Accept the fact that nobody gets through life without some sorrow and misfortune. In short, no one gets through this life unscathed.**

**Sixth, cultivate the old-fashioned virtues of love, honesty, humor, compassion, patience, forgiveness and loyalty.**

**Seven, you must know yourself. By that is meant, you must know your strengths and weaknesses. When there is too wide a gap between self-expectation and your abilities to meet the goals you have set, feelings of inadequacy are inevitable.**

**And finally, find something bigger than yourself to believe in. It was noted in the study that self-centered egotistical people score lowest in any test for measuring happiness.**

**Peace within would seem to be a no-brainer for the disciples of Jesus. Find something bigger than yourself to believe in. Jesus stands among us this**

**morning with His arms wide open waiting to embrace you and hold you like a loving parent. That is the ultimate key to peace of mind.**

**On December 26, 1944, Japanese Intelligence Officer Hiroo Onoda, arrived on Lubang Island in the Philippines. Onoda's orders were simple. He and his men were to stop the enemy from securing the island. But before this Japanese military unit could destroy the airstrip and blow up the pier, American forces captured Lubang Island. Onoda and three other Japanese soldiers fled to the hills and hid. They were still hiding a year later. Onoda discovered a leaflet that read, "The war ended on August 15, 1945. Come down from the mountains!" Onoda refused. His orders were clear. Under no circumstances was he to surrender. Unable to reach his superiors, Onoda and his men burrowed deeper into the hills. Five years later, in 1949, one of the men surrendered to Filipino forces. A few years after that, an aircraft dropped letters and pictures from Onoda's family, begging him to come home. Still he refused. In 1954 members of a search party accidentally killed one of Onoda's men. Twenty years later local police mistakenly shot the last of his comrades. Now only Onoda remained, alone and forgotten, fighting a war he'd already lost. On March 9, 1974, thirty years after he first went into hiding, Onoda emerged from the jungle. He surrendered his uniform, sword, rifle, hand grenades, and 500 rounds of ammunition. He'd already**

**surrendered thirty years of his life to isolation and fear. What a tragic waste!**

**But so it is with all who live as slaves to fear. But, Jesus means for us to have freedom from fear and peace in our hearts. So, how do you find peace?**

**I want to tell you a little story about my children. When my sons Brian and Dennis were little, they loved to ride extreme roller coasters. So I took them to Bush Gardens in Williamsburg, Virginia for a week of extreme roller coaster riding and taking in the sites of Historic Williamsburg. After riding several kiddy rides, my daughter Amy saw her brother's ride a very scary roller coaster called 'Apollo's Chariot.' Not wanting to be out done by her brothers Amy wanted to try it. Sitting in the seat, I buckled and tucked Amy safely into the seat and off we went. As the roller coaster went through steep dives and hair pin turns at rocket speed, Amy cried out and said, "Hold me, Daddy. Hold me." Once she leaned in against my arms, she relaxed and when it came to a stop she wanted to ride Apollo's Chariot again.**

**That experience with Amy taught me that, whenever we face something new and frightening in this life, all we need do is whisper to God, "Hold me God. Please hold me," just as my terrified Amy did on that roller coaster so many years ago. My point in telling you this simple little story is that as soon as we become aware of God's presence, we can relax, and we can rest, and we can**

**stop running, and finally we can find peace from within our hearts, and even begin to enjoy our God given lives. That is the true secret of peace which comes from within.**

**Isn't it time you quit running? Look at this beautiful baby, Robert James Chace held in the loving arms of his mother. This baby is fearless because he knows he is loved by his mother and father.**

**Isn't it time you nestled yourself into the arms of your Heavenly Father and let God hold you and love you? Jesus stands among us this morning and offers us His peace and speaks to our hearts saying, "Peace be with you!" AMEN.**